

## Article

# Albert Camus et 'L'État de siège': genèse d'un spectacle. Par Vincenzo Mazza

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*Albert Camus et 'L'État de siège': genèse d'un spectacle.* Par Vincenzo Mazza. (Études sur le théâtre et les arts de la scène, 9.) Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. 460 pp.

Although Albert Camus himself viewed the theatre as one of the places where he felt most content, the critical reception of his own drama has not always been a happy one. Yet Camus's understanding of theatre as a genre should not be underestimated, and pioneering works such as Raymond Gay-Crosier's *Les Envers d'un échec: étude sur le théâtre d'Albert Camus* (Paris: Minard, 1967) have led the way in an attempt, over the years, to redress the balance. '*L'État de siège* a été un échec', notes Vincenzo Mazza, fairly, in his Conclusion to the present volume (p. 359). However, the value of this study lies in its quest to understand the reasons for this failure through a careful examination of the genesis of the work, the conflicting objectives of those involved in its production, and what Mazza refers to as 'la multiplicité du texte' (p. 363). Opening on 27 October 1948 at the Théâtre Marigny in Paris, *L'État de siège* remained *à l'affiche* until 14 January 1949 after just twenty-two performances. While Camus was particularly fond of the work, it was not the product of him alone: the play was actually the result of a long intellectual evolution between Camus and the dramatists Jean-Louis Barrault and Antonin Artaud (with costumes and décor designed by Balthus), all of whom shared an interest in plague literature. Basing his work on rigorous primary research, Mazza skilfully unpicks the relationships between these key players, and examines how the project that would eventually become *L'État de siège* was originally intended to be a collaboration between Barrault and Jean-Paul Sartre (the first part of Mazza's work charts the association between Barrault and Sartre before a definitive split brings their partnership to an end). Camus dedicated *L'État de siège* to Barrault and, as the author demonstrates, there was indeed close co-operation between the two in preparing the work. And yet, as he also shows, their different perceptions of the role of the plague in the play (while Camus viewed it as an entirely negative symbol, tantamount to totalitarianism, Barrault deemed it a purifying force of evil with clear Artaudian overtones) resulted in 'la création d'un monstre à deux têtes' (p. 143). This lack of common understanding of what the work was trying to achieve was clearly instrumental in its critical disdain, an area that Mazza examines in considerable detail. 'Bien que le spectacle soit resté très peu de temps à l'affiche', he notes, 'la collaboration entre Camus et Barrault a joui d'une grande attention de la part de la presse' (p. 263). Drawing on contemporary reports, Mazza unveils a detailed account of the play's reception, pithily summarized thus by one critic: 'Trop de mots, et de mots vains' (cited p. 273). Yet, taken as a whole, Mazza's book shines a light on a work which, as another cited commentator puts it, 'n'est sans doute pas parfait, mais qui est incontestablement de qualité' (p. 292). It will be welcomed by the specialist and non-specialist reader alike.

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